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AUTHOR Meade, Anne
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ABSTRACT

"Boffins" have been identified by the New Zealand educator Glen Gawith as the category of learners who "delight in unrelated fragments of knowledge for knowledge's sake," and "put these fragments into a framework and analyze them." This paper uses a boffin-like approach to examine aspects of early childhood education in Aotearoa, New Zealand. The following "fragments of knowledge" are discussed: (1) Bronfenbrenner's connections between public policies and children's development; (2) the success of the Maori's Te Kohanga Reo schools in setting up an educational movement that operates in line with the indigenous people's conceptions of childhood and upbringing; (3) the view that curriculum that responds to the cultural diversity of students constitutes a framework for assurance of high quality education; (4) the need for teachers to know the reasons why certain early childhood education practices are considered good; and (5) early childhood education that is in children's best interests. It is suggested that the interests of children are not being served by the New Zealand Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices for early childhood centers, and that this statement is a threat to minority cultures. A recounting of ideological struggles regarding New Zealand's education of children provides a rationale for the early childhood community to maintain its collective involvement in counteracting public policies and practices that are detrimental to children, women, and cultural diversity. Contains 23 references. (LB)

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BOFFINS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Keynote address

Fifth Early Childhood Convention
Dunedin, 8-12 September, 1991

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Anne Meade
Senior Lecturer in Education
Victoria University of Wellington

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Nga mihi nui ki a koutou i tenei ra. E nga tangata whenua, tena koutou; e nga manuhiri ki Aotearoa, nau mai, haere mai; e nga tauiwi o nga hau e wha, tena koutou. Tena ra tatou katoa.

One of the delights of working in the field of early childhood education is that it is so diverse that many disciplines connect with issues in the field. I want to indulge my delight by playing with some fragments of knowledge, from a number of settings I move amongst, in a Boffin-like fashion; gather them together in order to analyse where we seem to be in early childhood education in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Gwen Gawith, an inspired New Zealand educator, wrote a book for students, called Power Learning, (1991). In it, she describes four categories of learner: The Boffin, The Butler, The Builder, and The Baker.

It is The Boffin who caught my eye.

Boffins, Gawith says, "delight in unrelated fragments of knowledge for knowledge's sake; interesting things happen when Boffins learn to put these fragments into a framework and analyse them," (Ibid, p. 9).

I propose to play with some fragments this morning and then try my hand at some connected knowing - to pick up the concept used by Anne Smith last night.

Bronfenbrenner

The first fragment is the connection Urie Brofenbrenner made between public policies and children's development. Brofenbrenner, at the second Early Childhood Convention in 1979, brought to us his theory of The Ecology of Human Development. It is based on a vast amount of data on the conditions that foster the optimal development of children. Bronfenbrenner boiled all the data down to two essential propositions.

1. "In order to develop normally, a child needs the enduring irrational involvement of one or more adults in care and joint activity with the child;

   and

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2. "[This] (the involvement of one or more adults in joint activity with the child) requires public policies and practices that provide opportunity, status, resources, encouragement, stability, example, and above all, time for parenthood, primarily by parents, but also by other adults, ... both inside and outside the home."

When speaking in New Zealand, Bronfenbrenner used the image of the Russian doll to powerful effect. He reminded us that parent and child dyads need at least one other support person - a third Russian doll - to enable them to function effectively. Even that is not enough, however. "Three-person systems also demand certain conditions for their survival and to function best," (Ibid). This is where the other Russian dolls have an influence. They represent informal social networks, and organisations (such as early childhood services), which care for children. All of these are affected by conditions resulting from social and economic policies, which may damage or support the child and those closest to her.

This leads me to ask the question: do we have such social and economic policies? It would be fair to say that New Zealand was making good progress towards *social* policies that were supportive of young families in the late 1980s. They included income policies such as Family Support, greater assistance with health care costs, the extension of the Special Education Service to preschoolers with disabilities and improved policies for early childhood education.

But we are also experiencing *economic* policies which have very ugly consequences for those tipped out of the labour market. We have increasingly become a divided society. Those who are in full-time paid jobs are working far longer hours, as our employing organisations become lean'n'mean. This leaves us with too little time for family and friends. Without *time*, we cannot engage in that important "joint activity with children".

Those who belong to families where no one is in paid employment are likely to be having a hard time surviving. Findings from Glen Elder's research (1974) is worth repeating. He found that one of the most powerful influences affecting the development of adults who were children in the Great Depression was parental unemployment. Children who were then under 10 years of age suffered marked long-term bad effects from their parents' unemployment.

Just what sort of time bomb are we sitting on in New Zealand? With over 10% unemployed and over 25% of Maori unemployed?

It may depend on whether we blame the victims. (Do we?)

It may depend on the level of financial stress that is associated with unemployment. (How are we doing in this respect?)

It may depend on the support systems available to families. (Do we foster community networks?)

Within this context, it my belief that people in early childhood services are making a significant contribution to building communities, and supporting families. Through this you could be improving the long-term survival of children. I shall argue later, you get no recognition for building networks because it is in conflict with the current economic ideology which is premised on individualism.

Different cultures have distinct blueprints

This year, another Bronfenbrenner observation has become more vivid for me. It is the second fragment that I want to share. He said,

> Within any culture, or subculture, settings of a given kind tend to be very much alike, whereas between cultures they are distinctly different. It is as if with each ... culture and subculture there existed a blueprint for the organisation of every kind of setting. Furthermore, the blueprint can be changed, ... and produce corresponding changes in behaviour and development," (1979, p.4)

This year, I included in a university course content about early childhood education in other countries in the South Pacific. Studying the provision of preschool education in the Cook Islands and in Western Samoa, I noted that the blueprint for early childhood services dominant in New Zealand was not adopted by our Pacific Island neighbours, despite considerable opportunities for them to learn our methods. For example, there has been little enthusiasm for kindergartens in Western Samoa even though the first kindergarten was established in Western Samoa about 20 years ago. However, a new model for early childhood services has just been shaped by the indigenous people of Western Samoa, and its popularity is growing by the month. I predict that now that the setting and culture are more in harmony, *and* a blueprint has been established based on Samoan beliefs and values, there will be corresponding changes in the development of Samoan children.

Those who attend the hui in 1981 and shaped the vision for Te Kohanga Reo decided that in order to change the achievement patterns of Maori children a move away from the 'blueprint' for mainstream early childhood settings was required. A new blueprint *was* established. The ensuring positive changes in behaviour and development of Maori children attending nga kohanga reo are now well known.

Less than five years after the first kohanga reo was established, some Pacific Island communities in New Zealand began to devise their blueprints for language groups, such as Aoga Amata.

I believe that Maori and Pacific Islanders' theoretical and practical understanding of ecology of human development outstrips those of many policy makers who are trying to impose uniformity on all early childhood services.

There is one thing, at least, that we can be thankful for in this area: the 1989 decisions to leave the management of early childhood services as they were prior. Imposing something like a board of trustees on kohanga reo and Pacific Island language groups would have been entirely inappropriate. As well, sensitivity was shown in the arrangement whereby Te Kohanga Reo was able to negotiate its own guidelines for charters. But, there has been a stumbling block: the regulations. What chance is there of

kohanga reo maintaining their blueprint, (their kaupapa), when they have to conform to standardised minimum standards?

I will return to this question later in my talk. Meanwhile I want to pick up another fragment now which supports the theory and practice of culturally different blueprints for early childhood settings.

OMEP: ECE to fit indigenous views of childhood and upbringing,

OMEP is a World Organisation for Early Childhood Education. A 1991 paper outlining an OMEP Development Programme says

> The focus on education and care at this age level cannot be separated from the context in which young children are living, (which indicates that all work for young childdren should be conducted in an integrated way, taking into account the cultural, local and personal initiatives and preferences).
>
> ... know[ing] the culture of socialisation and childrearing in the target countries, ... is a precondition for setting up a child care project in line with indigenous conceptions of childhood and upbringing,"

Te Kohanga Reo is a world leader in terms of an indigenous people setting up movement which operates in line with their own conceptions of childrearing and whanau development.

This demonstrates the obvious - that those who know each culture of socialisation and childrearing best are those who actually belong to each culture.

In Education to Be More (1988), the Meade committee stated that three elements are at the heart of all early childhood care and education services:

- features which are in *the interests of the child* - that is, good-quality services which meet the rights and needs of the child,
- features which are in *the interests of caregivers*,
- features which are *in the interests of cultural survival and transmission* to succeeding generations.
  (Ibid, p.6)

We were quite clear, too, that cultural transmission was *not* just for minority cultures. Early educators put a lot of time into socialisation of children and socialisation is largely cultural transmission by another name.

Talking about the features still, the Meade report continued,

> "It is essential for all three elements to be present in every early childhood care and education arrangement. If any one of the three is championed at the expense of the other two, then the service will be unacceptably inadequate. Achieving the correct balance is crucial,"
> (Ibid).

I believe that an indicator that balance exists between the three elements is growth. The growth of Te Kohanga Reo has been at an exponential rate. In 9 years, 616 nga kohanga reo have been established, (Manatu Maori, 1991). Maori leaders recognise also that

language and cultural transmission is not the whole story. Te Kohanga Reo is about the empowerment of parents and whanau and the children's learning is a priority. The three features are indeed in balance.

Another fragment now, on a different tack.

Framework for Quality Assurance: Diversity Please

Irene Balaquer and Helen Penn (1990), from the United Kingdom, make a useful distinction between quality assurance and quality practice.

Quality assurance is mostly the responsibility of government policy makers. Quality practice, on the other hand, is mostly the responsibility of early childhood staff and parents in local centres and home-based schemes.

Generally, quality assurance is created through the mechanisms of regulations and provision of training for early childhood teachers. In New Zealand, we have an additional mechanism - charters. In some other countries, accreditation of early childhood facilities serves a purpose similar to charters.

The literature on good quality childhood education, (eg, Smith & Swain, 1988; Farquhar, 1989; Kagan, 1990), says that a handful of features come through over and again as benefiting children. What we saw with the introduction of the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations, 1990, was government attention given to all those features pin-pointed by research that could be handled by the state. This was encouraging for early educators and reassuring for parents; it showed that the state was concerned for its youngest citizens.

Although some centres had trouble finding resources to meet minimum standards in time, especially when Cabinet imposed a moratorium on discretionary grants for months and months, and although some found one or two requirements to be excessive, few disagreed with the idea of standards to provide assurance. Therefore, the backwards steps announced in the 1991 Budget has raised anxieties.

I have only one major criticism of the regulations as a mechanism to implement quality assurance. In the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations, there is little or no cognisance of the different blueprints needed for the success of early childhood services for children from different cultural backgrounds.

Government is taking note of the fact that different blueprints apply where early childhood education occurs in homes and is developing a Code of Practice for home-based schemes. Why not recognise the different blueprint for Te Kohanga Reo and promulgate a code of practice for them? Obviously, this needs to be devised by Maori. And, by corollary, why not further codes for Pacific Island language groups? The Education Amendment Act (1990) does not limit the number of codes of practice.

Without some diversity in providing for quality assurance, that is in accord with different cultural blueprints, the state is in danger of inhibiting the development of kohanga reo and language groups and, more importantly, the children and adults in them.

> As an aside, I want to comment that there could be another similar threat on the horizon. The Ministry of Education has recently let a contract for the development of national curriculum guidelines for early childhood services.

Margaret Carr and Helen May from Waikato University are working on these guidelines. They have insisted on multiple curricula with different cultural groups in charge of their own.

Why must there be different curricula? Because, in the curricula resides cultural and knowledge, (Meade, 1990a): However, I want to ask, will multiple curricula survive the implementation stage (especially given the unresolved issue of what to do in multicultural settings).

Devaluing of the charter concept

I have a major criticism of the devaluing of the charter as a part of the quality assurance model. My criticism is of the Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices, promulgated on 6 December, 1990, and distributed to early childhood services via the Education Gazette on 14 December (after most centres had finished for the year).

What is the relationship between charters and the Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices meant to be? In one part of the Gazette notice the Statement is described as the core of charters. (I thought that is what licenses and codes of practice are?) In the next sentence, the Statement is described as a framework. Confused? I am, and so are many others.

The law permits (but does not require) the Minister of Education to gazette a statement of desirable objectives and practices. This option has been adopted. I have several criticisms of what has happened to the charter guidelines in their revised format.

1. Nowhere does the Gazette notice make it clear whether or not Te Kohanga Reo are exempt from these new charter guidelines because their Trust negotiated its own charter guidelines. There are many references in the Statement to *every* chartered early childhood centre.

   Thus, I wonder whether the use of the Trust guidelines varies from district to district, and whether some liaison officers are taking the Statement into kohanga instead of the Trust charter guidelines?

2. There is an increase of central control over the content of the charters. The Early Childhood Management Handbook had a mix of requirements and things that management had to plan towards. Now, there are over 60 objectives and practices listed in the Statement. They are deemed part of charters. Thus far more of the charters are prescribed by government. Why wasn't the former division of requirements and plans retained so that centre planning and 'ownership' could continue?

   Listen to the language in the Introduction to the Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices for Chartered Early Childhood Services:

   "These objectives and practices are deemed to be part of the charter of every chartered early childhood centre ... and are to apply to the management and staff of every chartered early childhood service ... [my emphasis]

   "The way in which these objectives and practices are to be met, together with any other objectives and practices particular to an early childhood service which do

not run counter to the objectives and practices as set out in this statement, shall be set out in the charters of each early childhood service."

The objectives in the Statement are often more like content prescriptions than developmental principles and strategies. The word 'plan', a key word in the Management Handbook indicating a developmental approach, is far less evident.

3. It is difficult to tell how much the requirements themselves have, in fact, changed between the Management Handbook version and the Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices. We are told "the modifications are minimal and do not alter the substance of the original requirements". However, changes in substance have been uncovered by many people: for example, the section regarding the Treaty of Waitangi. Centres and liaison officers are finding it challenging to work out whether a charter written under the old guidelines conforms to the new.

4. Charters were submitted in mid-1990. Awareness of the Statement did not seem to surface until about Easter this year, and even then centres were not adequately advised that its existence meant revisiting their charter. This has meant inadequate opportunity for revisions to be worked on by all concerned: parents, staff and management.

The *process* of charter writing was to be and has often been the enormous strength of charters. Now, however, people's reactions are that charters are a bureaucratic nuisance, rather than a constructive tool for growth and development.

I also have a major criticism of the way the Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices has been introduced. Not only has there been too little time for revision but local partnership has been disregarded. I have heard many examples where liaison officers have gone in with a Statement and said to centre *staff*, "Don't worry about your charter, just sign that you will do what it says here." The parent-staff-management partnership is being ignored.

The 'sign here' approach makes me angry. Research (Meade, 1985; Smith & Swain, 1988) shows that staff goals strongly influence child outcomes. The staff will not 'own' the Statement's objectives unless given the chance to work through them. Moreover, they may stop reflecting on goals and objectives, because there are now over 60 objectives given to them by the government. Who would want to create more of their own? This takes me back to my earlier confusion about the Statement being a core or a framework (the skin). The picture that is emerging is that it is the whole 'apple'!

The charter development process was significant in the lives of centres in 1990, in building closer relationships between staff, parents and management, and in order to clarify centre goals and objectives. Where parents and staff have *worked together,* outcomes are more significant for children and other family members, (eg, Consortium, 1979, Athey, 1990). The 'sign here' exponents discount (even nullify) the significance all that hard, but good constructive work. Such officers are operating from a separate-knowledge model, whereas many centres now have connected-knowledge and want to make sure that everyone stays connected, (Smith, 1991).

If handling of the Statement has come to the point of officals saying "Don't worry about your charter ...", why have not decision-makers seen that the Statement has become a Juggernaut and the Statement is a major problem?

Does this picture indicate that the decision-makers have reflected on their policy sufficiently? Did they know why they made the changes? Did they consider how liaison officers were to implement it? Did they consider the later review process? I believe not.

My personal view is that the structure in the Management Handbook should have been retained with only minimal requirements deemed part of charters. The majority of charters should comprise centre or scheme plans so that early childhood services have plenty of opportunity to add their own "stamp".

I think the confusion that I have described above demonstrates that our policy makers need to pay more attention to 'know-why', the theory of policy practice. In the next fragment, I want to make the case for early childhood professionals also having 'know-why' as well as 'know how', (Athey, 1990).

Framework for Quality Programmes: know how, and know why

I want now to challenge early childhood staff. I want to ask you whether you are regularly conscious of the 'know why' of your actions as well as of the 'know how'? Many of you have heard me on other occasions make a plea for 'adult-erated play'. When you get involved in children's play, however, you need to know *why* you are there. 'Know-why' needs to be based on study and on reflection according to Chris Athey (1980).

The truth of this was born out in Nancy Bell's recent research (1989). She found that less qualified staff used their own personal childhood experiences rather than professional understanding as their guidelines where analysis and evaluation was not ongoing.

I believe that we are weak on extending young children's thinking in New Zealand early childhood centres. Last week in Wellington, Lilian Katz treated us to an inspiring slide show from her recent trips to preschools in Reggio Emilia in Italy. The depth and extent of those Italian children's thinking evident in their art was amazing.

We seem to have a real 'kiwi cringe' in this country about aiming and taking action to enhance the cognitive development in preschoolers. Why? I think part of the explanation is that we have been influenced by educational leaders such as Susan Issacs and Gwen Somerset to back away from 'teach and test' approaches to education. It is *good* that we have never adopted the psychometric 'teach and test' approach, nor been obsessive about IQ gains. However, in avoiding IQs, have we overlooked the importance of skilfully handling children's growth in cognition? I think we have. As well, we seem to have thrown out all evaluation, perhaps for similar reasons.

I would argue that we need to develop or reconsider our conceptual frameworks about what good early childhood is. If we are to 'know-why' early childhood education is good, then we must undertake more assessment, but the assessment needs to focus on the effectiveness of programmes.

This year, NAEYC has published "Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 Through 8" (1991). These guidelines do not emphasize assessment of children; rather they emphasize evaluating how well a programme is meetings its goals. This does not mean that children are not considered, but, rather, where they are assessed, it is for the purposes of planning for their learning and for communicating with parents.

These guidelines merit study in New Zealand, and adaptation to suit our different cultures. The Minister of Education has a strong interest in assessment. Early childhood professionals need to articulate their principles of assessment which will enhance early childhood education in this country. Otherwise we may be hoist with inappropriate approaches. As well, given the propositions I advanced earlier that different cultures have distinctive blueprints for early childhood services, it is important that we accept that different cultural groups will develop their own ways of assessing their programmes.

In the Present and for the Future

Lilian Katz is more eloquent than I in saying it is easy to get children to do all manner of things and that they can do many things, but should they?

When we were working on the Meade report, I became exasperated at the number of times decision-makers wanted to know what were the long-term benefits of early childhood education, without showing a similar level of interest in the here-and-now benefits. I think that parents and staff assess early childhood services in terms of *present* as well as future value. It is those who are interested in economic outcomes who concentrate most on future values.

How often have *you* asked yourself whether your actions are in the best *interests* of the child in the present *and* for the future? Asking both parts of the question *must* be integral to a 'know-why' approach at the local level for quality programmes.

It is time for me to start correcting some fragments together, like a Bofffin. **B**ronfenbrenner and **O**MEP advised us on culturally appropriate diverse blueprints. I have argued that to do so needs diverse **F**rameworks for quality assurnace and diverse **F**rameworks for quality programmes. I believe the interests of children **I**n the present and for the future have not been served by the Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices being steam-rollered over the top of charters collectively devised by staff, parents and managers. It *could* mean the death-knell of different blueprints for different cultures unless minority cultures stay away from bulk funding and charters. It will certainly mean the death-knell of different blueprints for different cultures if national curriculum guidelines (in process) comprise one set of guidelines only *and* they are deemed part of charters. Early childhood curricula are about socialisation, and socialisation is about transmission of culture. Given the awful tale of what happened to charter guidelines when they became part of the legal framework, my plea is that early childhood curricula never became part of objectives and practices.

New Right Ideology

I have been asking myself why so much attention was focussed on early childhood education in the 1991 round of reviews - four review teams out of a total of 17/18 reviews in the education system were concerned with facets of early childhood provisions. This too has stimulated me to be like a Boffin, and try and learn by putting some fragments into an analytic framework.

If you have read Harvey McQueen's The Ninth Floor (1991) - a personal story by Prime Minister Lange's education speech writer - you will find that early childhood funding was a really contentious issue between David Lange and Roger Douglas. Spending on early childhood education was certainly not favoured by Finance Minister Douglas, even though the magnitude of the increases being considered was only raising expenditure from 2% of Vote Education to 3.5% of Vote Education - a $86M increase in a full year from a Vote which totals about $4 billion.

What seems to be happening in 1991 is a re-run of earlier ideological struggles, with early childhood education as the 'meat in the sandwich'. Early childhood education was, and is again, an arena where ideological conflict is being worked out. The significant aspect of the struggle is indicated by Minister Shipley being reported earlier this year as considering re-introductioning the care and education separation.

Michael Apple (1989) talks about an ideological shift in common sense that is currently occurring where the New Right is reconstructing our ideas about inequality. He says that sites of struggle are where different groups with distinct political and cultural visions attempt to define what means and ends of society are to be. Early childhood education is a site a struggle. The struggle is between those of us in the field and Treasury and their ilk.

It is clear to those of us in the early childhood sector that women and Maori formed a coalition in the 1980s for the advancement of children, women and Maori. That coalition - because of our shared goals and cooperative approach got a foot in the door and managed to obtain some very advantageous decisions for early childhood education from the Fourth Labour Government, (Meade, 1990b). This was no mean feat given the unequal position of young children, women and Maori.

Part of the recurring struggle seems to be because the New Right are trying to move away from a people-oriented focus.

Treasury criticisms that the early childhood policies are too economically expensive are a load of rubbish given the relatively tiny proportion of the Vote spent on early childhood education. Sweden spends 2.0% of GNP on childcare - the same proportion as it spends on Defence!

Could it be that the gains made by early childhood education are too ideologically 'expensive'? The New Right assert that people are only motivated by self-interest to gain wealth, status and/or power. People involved in early childhood organisations demonstrate that they are motivated to do hundreds of hours of work for children (often not their own) for minimal status and power and no wealth. In other words, altruism exists.

The New Right assert that services are only really effective when individual choice is maximised. Maori involved in Te Kohanga Reo demonstrate that whanau collective action produces really effective services.

The New Right assert that equity principles are in conflict with excellence in the classroom. Early childhood teachers demonstrate that child-centred developmentally appropriate programmes (where individual all-round development is pursued at the same time as a curriculum for the group) can combine equity and excellence.

The New Right assert that competition is the way to improve quality. Early childhood organisations have demonstrated that cooperation and collective action have brought about the changes known to be associated with quality early education.

In other words, early childhood educators demonstrate the falseness of many (most) claims made by the New Right. We get no thanks for our collective success - only reviews and more reviews.

Michael Apple (Ibid) distinguishes between 'property rights' and 'people rights'. He suggests that when the conflicts between groups are intense, those interested in property rights (usually the dominant groups) are claiming restoration or expansion of their perogatives..Does this ring a bell? I detect a number of examples of this push in the Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices, in the Employment Contracts Act, and in the Budget decisions which reduce quality, and reduce infant places in childcare, with concommitant effects on women. 'People rights' in early childhood education are being chipped away.

My question is: could it be that dominant groups fear that the Before Five policies have advanced the perogative of women too far? The signs are there that early childhood services have encroached into dominant groups' power domains, and those groups don't like it.

When early childhood people have acted like Boffins and put their fragment together into a shared framework, we have been able to make good progress towards quality early childhood education that works for children in the present and for the future. When New Zealand early childhood organisations developed a shared agenda, they were able lead the Western world in doing away with the damaging care/education dichotomy. When Maori developed a shared framework, they led the world in providing their own distinctive blueprint, Te Kohanga Reo, that fits their aspirations for Maori children.

Currently we are being tempted to consider competition. Tenders are called for some of the Early Childhood Development Unit's work. This is very worrying. I believe that the path of competition leads towards inequality and to the loss of attention to the distinctive needs of Maori and other ethnic and cultural groups. We have recently attained a much more equitable system. If we collude in moves to divide us, *we* will have to take responsibility for backwards steps. We must continue to work together within a framework which is in the interests of children, of caregivers and the maintenance of a caring society.

If I am right that we are very threatening to those who have traditionally been the dominant groups, there will be further attacks on the sector. The future attacks may be on:

- quality early childhood education for children,
- early childhood education assisting women furthering their qualifications as part of a positive labour market policy,
- women using early childhood services to participate more fully in New Zealand society and,
- those who are offer alternative blueprints for early childhood services to maintain their culture and language.

We must continue our seeming-irrational collective involvement to counteract New Right public policies and practices. The proven value of our cooperative action based on

shared goals and understanding is what is provoking the attack. We know why we were successful. Let's go on proving the value standing together. Ignore the calls for competion and act with solidarity.

This brings me back to the whakatauki of early childhood conventions:

"Kahikatea tu i te uru."

Alone and isolated kahikatea can be uprooted. With their roots interwined together they grow to be forest giants. Let us become giants in this increasingly hostile world. Let us join together on the ground *and* allow growth in diverse ways above the ground.

No reira, tena koutou katoa.

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